

Image and Marriage

1. It is clear from Scripture that originally *some* restrictions were placed on the rôle of women in the Church. Two passages stand out in particular:
 - 1 Timothy 2:12, ‘I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.’
 - 1 Corinthians 14:34: ‘women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.’
2. Others would also see limitations imposed by the fact that Jesus only chose men to be Apostles, though this has tended to be a less-important consideration amongst Evangelicals who do not see the ministry of the twelve Apostles as transferable.
3. At the same time, however, a close reading of Scripture reveals that these limitations were themselves subject to limitations! 1 Ti 2 seems to place a blanket prohibition on women teaching men, yet in Acts we read that Paul’s good friend Priscilla joined with her husband in teaching Apollos: ‘When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately’ (Ac 18:26).

Similarly, although 1 Corinthians 14:34 might seem to require absolute silence from women in the congregation, yet chapter 11 clearly presumes they will have a public rôle in prophesying and praying:

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. (1 Co 11:4-5)

It is clear that both men *and* women will pray or prophesy. The difference lies not in their action but in their demeanour.

4. What might explain such limitations and the apparent anomalies to which we have referred? A comparison of the key passages reveals a possible clue:

<p>Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head — it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since <u>he is the image and glory of God</u>; but the woman is the glory of man. For <u>man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man</u>. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the Lord, however, <u>woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman</u>. But everything comes from God. Judge for yourselves: Is it [appropriate] for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. <u>If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice — nor do the churches of God.</u> (1 Co 11:3-16)</p>	<p>Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. [And] The spirits of prophets are [in submission to] the prophets. <u>For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent</u> in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. [If there is anything they desire to learn — ESV], they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? <u>If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.</u> Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. <u>But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.</u> (1 Co 14:29-40)</p>	<p>Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church — for we are members of his body. <u>“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”</u> This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church. <u>However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.</u> (Eph 5:22-33)</p>	<p>I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For <u>Adam was formed first, then Eve</u>. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <u>But [she] will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.</u> (1 Ti 2:9-15)</p>
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5. From this table a number of features emerge:
- a. All four passages make reference to the marriage relationship. In 1 Co 11 woman was created ‘for man’, referring back to the creation of Eve as a companion for Adam. In 1 Co 14 wives are to learn from ‘their own husbands’ at home. Eph 5 is clearly all about marriage and 1 Ti 2 talks about childbearing, which would occur within marriage.
 - b. The issue of ‘submission’ features in three of the four passages. In 1 Co 14 the prophetic ‘spirits’ are in submission to the prophets. In Eph 5 wives are in submission to husbands. In 1 Ti 2 the woman is to be in submission, though the object of her submission is not specified.
 - c. In 1 Co 11 women are to be *silent* in the churches but to *learn* from ‘their own husbands’ at home. In 1 Ti 2 women are to *learn* and, rather than ‘to teach or to have authority over a man’, are to be ‘*silent*’.
 - d. Three of the four passages (1 Co 11, Eph 5 and 1 Ti 2) show a background awareness of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve.
 - e. In Eph 5 it is clear that a man is specifically his *wife’s* head and not simply the head of any and every woman. This is not so immediately obvious in 1 Co 11, particularly since the Greek for wife and husband may simply mean woman and man. However, the significant use of the Genesis account as a key part of the argument in 1 Co 11 suggests strongly that the husband and wife relationship is as much in Paul’s mind at this point as it is in Eph 5, particular when we consider the use Eph 5 also makes of the Genesis account.
 - f. 1 Co 11 and 14 are both clearly concerned with the ‘good order’ of the Church. By contrast Eph 5 forms part of a so-called *haustafel* — instructions for ‘good order’ in the home. The context of 1 Ti 2 is also concerned with good order: ‘I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes’ etc (1 Ti 2:8-9).
6. Taken together, these comparisons suggest that the interpretive framework for the New Testament proscriptions is *the good order of the marital relationship between a man and a woman as it is to be reflected within the life of the Church*.
7. In support of this, we may note the very similar assumptions behind the *haustafel* of 1 Pe 3:1-7, and the link there between ‘good order’ in the marital relationship and the prayer-life of the couple concerned:
- Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. ⁴ Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. ⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.
8. But why should Scripture be so concerned about the relationship between husband and wife, why should it structure that relationship in this way, and why should it be binding on us

today? The answer is that the marriage relationship models (we might even say ‘images’) the relationship between Christ and the Church:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church — ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. (Eph 5:25-32)

9. It should be noted that Paul does *not* argue from marriage to the relationship between Christ and the Church. He emphatically does *not* say ‘Christ is like a good husband’. Rather, he says a good husband should be like Christ. The *reality* is ‘Christ and the Church’. Marriage is just the model — albeit a very important model.
10. This explains how we should understand the otherwise-enigmatic statement of Genesis 1:27: ‘So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.’ God is imaged by mankind-as-male-and-female. Taken as individuals, however, men and women are equally ‘men’. Thus in Ge 5:1-2 we are told:

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. ² He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them ‘man.’
[Heb *adam*]

Again (whether or not we agree with the death penalty), it is clear in Ge 9:6 that you only have to kill either a man or a woman (not a ‘brace’ of human beings!) to be guilty of destroying the image of God:

Whoever sheds the blood of man [Heb *adam*], by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.

11. At the risk of being over technical, we may therefore conclude that, as regards men and women individually, *gender difference lacks ontological significance*. That is to say, there is nothing about *being* a man or a woman which, *per se*, makes one more or less a bearer of the divine image. **In this regard we differ from Anglo-Catholics, who hold that gender is of ontological significance and that therefore, since the Christian priest represents Christ, he must necessarily be male, just as Christ was male.**
12. However, we do see within Scripture that *gender difference is of relational significance*. It is as men and women *relate* to one another as gendered beings (specifically as husband and wife) that it matters crucially which is which and affects how the image of God is perceived.
13. Moreover, the significance of their differences is no mere matter of cultural convention. It is not because of social tradition that the husband is the head of his wife, but because Christ is the head of the Church. And this therefore means that the rôles derived from this difference cannot be reversed. The wife cannot be the head of her husband, nor can the husband be subject to his wife, without violating the image of ‘Christ and the Church’ displayed in marriage.
14. Indeed, the message of Genesis 3 is that the tendency to reverse rôles in this regard is a result of the fall. In Ge 3:16, God addresses the woman thus:

Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.

The key to understanding this verse is to recognise the almost identical words (in the Hebrew) regarding sin and Cain which we find in Ge 4:7:

It desires to have you, but you must master it.

As Susan Foh argues ('What is the Woman's Desire?', *Westminster Theological Journal* 1975, no. 37, pp 376-383), sin's 'desire' for Cain is a will to dominate him — something which Cain is therefore commanded to resist. We must therefore see the woman's desire in Ge 3:16 as being to dominate her husband. However, just as Cain failed to master sin, there is no guarantee *from within the text* that Adam will successfully resist Eve's attempts to dominate him. The English versions of Ge 3:16 ('he *will* rule over you') assume too much in this regard! The man's tendency to 'listen to the voice' of his wife (Ge 3:17) is itself a consequence of the Fall as well as a cause.

15. What both husbands and wives must resist in marriage, however, is not the murderous desire of sin towards Cain but the *positive* desire of Eve towards Adam:

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Ge 3:6)

Eve is persuaded to disobey God by a positive inducement: 'You will be like God' (Ge 3:5). But why does Adam not resist her? We might just as well ask why husbands do not resist their wives today! And thus the lesson of the biblical material is that a husband needs a certain amount of 'backbone' with regard to his wife if he is to be to her as Christ is to the Church, just as the wife must resist her own frustration with her husband, however well grounded she may feel it to be, if she is to be toward him as the Church is towards Christ.

16. This, however, is why relationships between men and women matter in the Church as well as in the home. If the home is where 'Christ and the Church' is to be modelled by husband and wife, then the Church should reflect and enhance the good order of the home. Thus, whilst it may not matter who *is* what in the Church, it certainly matters who *does* what. Within our Anglican structures, this means that we must address with all seriousness the question whether a woman vicar or bishop can, in this rôle, be towards her own husband (if she has one) or towards other women's husbands, a model of the Church towards Christ. Equally we may ask whether men who obey and submit to her leadership within the Church (as they should if she is in such a rôle — see Heb 13:17), will learn thereby to be towards their own wives at home as Christ is towards the Church.
17. My own conviction, in the light of the biblical material, is negative. Thus it is not *what* a man may learn from a woman in the Church which matters, but *that* he learns from her. Priscilla could teach Apollos because her husband Aquila *also* taught Apollos. But Priscilla could not teach Aquila without harming their relationship. A woman could pray or prophesy in Corinth without prejudice to her relationship with her husband, provided she did not 'cast off' his 'headship' of her in the Church. And a prophet could submit to the other prophets during that part of the meeting without prejudice to relationships in the home, provided a man was not silenced by his wife (or, indeed, someone else's wife).
18. If correct, this analysis may help us address some of the questions of biblical application today. Some of those applications may allow us a greater flexibility than we currently exercise. However, in the somewhat unbiblical, and extremely hierarchical structures of Anglicanism, it should also caution us about where we place women within that hierarchy whilst it remains unreformed from a biblical perspective.